



Conference Paper

III. STATE CULTURAL POLICY AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF
ETHNIC CULTURESSpecialized Approaches to Cultural Policy in
Stressed Regions

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Abstract

The article explores specialized approaches required for the successful implementation of cultural policy in stressed regions. By 'stressed regions', we mean strategic administrative territorial units which have lost their developmental potential. We analyze the genesis of stressed regions based on the example of Chelyabinsk region and the city of Chelyabinsk, which invariably occupy the leading positions as the most ecologically problematic regions of Russia. We propose cultural policy tools that could counteract the stress effect.

Keywords: cultural policy, region, stressed region, cultural policy tools

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1. Introduction

The discussions of cultural policy remain relevant due to the increasing dynamism of sociocultural transformations, increased contradictions between the global and the local, and the deformation of many traditional paradigms of life organization. Meaningful cultural policy is a precondition required to overcome the chaotic character of the unfolding transformations.

We understand cultural policy as a "purposeful long-term oriented activity facilitating the development of society (or its part) within the well-chosen and artificially introduced cultural norms and promulgated values" [5, p. 73]. This interpretation assumes that doctrinal and projective characteristics are integral to the cultural policy. This, in turn, creates a need to elucidate typological characteristics of a subject of cultural policy and the technological basis needed to realize its demands.

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This article focuses on the specifics of choosing a regional cultural policy: its dependence on the place-time (the region's internal characteristics) and time-context (the region's position within the network of external connections).

2. Region as an Object of Cultural Policy

When analyzing a region as a subject of cultural policy, we treat it as an "artificially technical – that is, a constructed – object" [3] purposefully created in a certain place at a certain historical point. On the other hand, many predetermined regional traits become lost with time (through changes in initial situation and initial purpose, generational change, migration, external context, etc.) and replaced with the new ones, while the regional character is increasingly being created by a natural self-organization of its internal life. According to N.M.Genova, "this evolution of the region's cultural space, as a unity of process and configuration, leads to the qualitative changes in its cultural core, which expands to include the entire architectonics of the region's cultural environment – a process that finds its concrete reflection also in changing resources of cultural activity" [1, p. 11].

Despite the fact that Russian culturological discourse has developed a detailed theoretical approach to the regional typology and regional specifics, as well as to the characteristics of regional culture, this discourse almost completely ignores the regions under the conditions of developmental stagnation – those regions that, despite having enough internal resources, have lost their developmental perspectives. Here we use the term 'stressed region' to describe these kind of administrative units, taking into consideration the fact that, unlike crisis, stressed situation may preserve for a long time. Introducing this concept into the field of regional studies is particularly important due to the role these regions play in a country's overall economy.

Stressed regions are administrative and territorial units systemically important for the national economic complex, which have lost (are losing) their developmental growth potential.

Based on the key words in this definition, stressed regions are not just *any* regions that are facing challenges, but only those that are vital for an overall national economy. Being 'vital' in this context means that it is impossible to 'exclude' such regions from a system of internal economic relations without incurring a significant economic and social damage on the entire country. Stressed regions are *administrative and territorial units* (large industrial cities, regions, republics); they do not include other types of regions (cultural, virtual, etc.) The threat to the developmental potential is understood

as an impossibility to create efficient competitive development within the existing (at the point of 'stressed' diagnosis) managerial, industrial and social practices.

3. Characteristics of the Stressed Regions

The key **problem** of the stressed regions is a contradiction between their objectively high technological and economic status within the regional hierarchy; their high 'obligations' to support efficient economic activity – and a degradation of infrastructures that underpin the regions' sustainable development and their industry-specific and territorial competitiveness.

The term 'high status' is used here in its standard definition ('state', 'position') [6], with the particular emphasis on the historically acquired connotations describing the region as economically and socially successful (strong, developed, etc.). The term 'obligation' is put in quotes since here it *does not* mean any formal contractual legally binding relations between the economic units (although these relations may form a part of such obligations), but, first and foremost, the long-standing *expectations*, as well as business and budget practices developed and maintained based on these expectations (forecasted business transactions, tax revenues, traditional social programs, prospective scientific breakthroughs and their implementation, etc.). The economic effectiveness is understood as a positive difference between the net regional income and its net expenses required to maintain the region, service debt and participate in federal projects relevant for the region in question. Degradation of infrastructure is interpreted as a set of interconnected circumstances: 1) depreciation of equipment, technological systems, buildings, facilities, etc.; 2) decreasing efficiency of the life supporting systems: education, healthcare, public order, etc.; 3) qualitatively non-replenishable drain of human capital leaving for other regions.

At some point, the last aspect becomes the dominant one and conditions the other two. Taken together, these circumstances radically worsen the region's image, decrease its administrative quality and lead to an exponential growth of stress-generating conditions. It is highly probable that an increasing reproduction and transmission of negative value-normative theoretical and practical paradigms (that is, the region's culture) may push this problem to a critical level.

The unique characteristic of 'stressed regions' (unlike the 'crisis' regions) is a paradoxical co-existence of a high level of *N*-conflict existence (where *N* means key stress-generating factors) and a mundane habitual reflection of this conflict in the everyday

practices and perceptions of the region's population (since *N*-factor becomes a routine background factor of everyday life).

On the one hand, this habituation prevents the population, up to a point, from protesting against the *N*-factor. The residents perceive this factor as a threat to their interests, but they don't express practical readiness to change the existing situation (or only express it as a declaration). However, on the other hand, the lack of any prospects for improvement significantly decreases personal attachment the residents feel to their territory, thus producing a regional anti-patriotism.

At the same time, *N*-factor may become aggravated at any moment stimulated either by real emergencies (technological, ecological, judicial etc.) and/or by the opportunistic political or business-driven actions of relevant parties.

The causes of stressed regions vary. As an example, let us turn to the Chelyabinsk region and the city of Chelyabinsk, which invariably occupy the leading positions as the most ecologically problematic cities and regions of Russia. In this region, ecology served as an *N*-factor that had activated the stressed state (became a stressor) [2].

1. Eco-stress became a part of the city mentality, creating among the population an inherent negative connotation of their own native region. This is reflected as follows: negative ecological image of the region is transmitted through interpersonal communications; the members of affluent and entrepreneurial elite have left the region and relocated to more ecologically favorable (in their opinion) conditions; the replacement inflow of new residents of similar economic and cultural status is decreasing; the region's investment and tourist attractiveness is diminished.
2. Protest eco-movements arose and became the stakeholders in the region's politics and economy.
3. Ecological culture of the region's residents is declining: this is reflected in the diminished behavioral self-control both in the contacts with natural objects and in everyday behavior.

It is obvious that the traditional awareness-raising and educational approach to the cultural policy is not effective in stressed regions. It seems that in such regions the very tools of cultural policy create an alternative stressed effect, providing a relatively fast transcoding of the *N*-factor in a conceptually opposite value-normative system.

The essential result of cultural policy is a sustainable *reproducibility* of concrete norms and values in people's minds and practices. In stressed regions, such norms and values should be able to create a new cultural environment, radically different from the one that emerged through the influence of *N*-factor.

Addressing the Chelyabinsk situation, we believe that the following measures (whose radical character may create receptiveness to subsequent efforts of cultural transformation) will be necessary:

1. Radical administrative solutions are necessary to address the key regional stress-generating factors: prohibition of the construction of mining and processing facility; introduction of new laws restricting the industrial pollution; it is important to monitor government agencies in the particularly stress-susceptible municipalities in order to break affiliate connections; in general, measures to correct the elites' behavior are required, in order to increase their 'connectivity' with the region.
2. It is important to create a system of public discussion of the region's perspectives. Publicity is a required in urban planning and urban development.
3. As many residents as possible should be encouraged to participate in urban improvement, with employers working to organize such projects.
4. An anti-stress scenario and an alternative regional development strategy is needed (which should include a transition to a qualitatively new developmental structure).
5. Long-term planning of anti-stress processes is required, in order to create self-reproducing patterns of behavior.

4. Preliminary Conclusions

It is obvious that cultural policy in stressed regions ceases to be an inside regional affair. It is difficult to develop and implement without the support of the higher-level resources (primarily federal). Federal expert and administrative participation also becomes a special characteristic of the cultural policy in relevant regions.

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